

BOOTS IN THE FOREST

NAME: Marie Willis

POSITION: Facilities Engineer

PHOTO LOCATION: Supervisor's Office // Boise National Forest



CAPTION: Boise National Forest Facilities Engineer Marie Willis divides her time between the office and the field, as demonstrated by her footwear.

In the last month alone, Boise National Forest facilities engineer Marie Willis has traveled from the very top of the Forest to the very bottom, looking at recreation sites, facilities and water systems. As winter draws to a close, Willis transitions from “office season” to “field season.” Willis, as the facilities engineer, ensures that more than 600 buildings and 120 water systems forest-wide are properly maintained, verifying that people are living, working and recreating in safe environments.

Willis, who came to the Boise National Forest 15 years ago, received her bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Boise State University. Her career with the Forest Service began through the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP), which provides career experience that aligns with a student's path of study. After completing her degree, Willis was converted to a staff engineer on the Boise National Forest. In 2011, she became the facilities engineer.

“I love that I get to see things get accomplished every season. I can make a list of things that need to be done and get the projects contracted,” says Willis. “It makes me feel good that the public can respect the work that’s being completed and see that their money is well-spent.”

During the winter months, when many places on the Forest are inaccessible, Willis works in the office, completing a number of projects. She is responsible for the management of new facilities project proposals, which include, designing the project in AutoCAD, putting together a budget and contracting the physical implementation.

For many projects, Willis identifies potential cooperators and partners and drafts grant proposals to help with funding. Willis also works with the Forest facilities maintenance staff, addressing issues that have been submitted through the facilities ticketing system. Additionally, she offers consultation for projects from other departments, such as heritage, reviews permits and handles other issues related to facilities.

Once the weather warms, Willis heads into the field, completing condition and deferred maintenance surveys across the Forest. Facilities, drinking water systems and waste water systems are on a five-year cycle, meaning that they are guaranteed to be reviewed every five years, to ensure functionality and safety.

When Willis finds items that need repair, her first step is to pull out the toolbox from her truck and see if she can make the fix herself. If that’s not feasible, she’ll enter it into the maintenance ticketing system, where she can then address the issue by providing staff or contractors to make the repairs.



Willis also serves as one of the leading forces behind the cabin restoration and rental program. She dedicates time to the cleanup and renovation process of historic cabins and guard stations on the Forest. Once revitalized, the sites are placed into the Forest’s cabin rental program, allowing visitors to rent them for a unique stay on the Forest. For Willis, it’s “fun and rewarding” to see these places cleaned up and put back in proper order.

One of the more prominent projects that Willis has worked on is the restoration of Landmark Ranger Station on the Cascade Ranger District, which features more than 20 cabins and

buildings across the compound. Built in the 1930's by Civilian Conservation Corps crews, Landmark served as home for some of Boise National Forest's most iconic foresters and rangers. Willis's dedication to the preservation of Landmark's historic integrity while upgrading its functionality to meet today's safety needs is been an impressive achievement.

Willis has worked on a number of similar restoration projects, including the renovation and historic preservation of the Warm Springs Guard Station, located on the Lowman Ranger District. For her work on this project, Willis was presented the Orchid Award in 2011, the highest achievement given by Preservation Idaho.

Even when Willis isn't making her rounds on the Forest for work, she can still be found outside, usually with her husband and their two sons. Living on an acre of land, her family spends time gardening, as well as, tending to their horse and chickens. For vacations, the National Parks are a popular destination—Willis wants her kids to see as many of them as possible. As a family they enjoy fishing, camping, rock collecting and visiting high mountain lakes.

And as if Willis doesn't stay busy enough, she is also an active member of the National Guard, working in survey design. Willis, who originally worked for the Idaho Department of Transportation on road engineering, still has a passion for "rocks and dirt" as she says.

Even though she doesn't deal primarily with rocks and dirt as a facilities engineer, Willis still wouldn't trade her job for anything.

"The Forest Service is the greatest place in the world to work and the people I work with are incredible," Willis believes. "Where else could I work that I have an office window with a view of the valley and a windshield view of the forest and wildlife?"